DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 553 CS 007 339

AUTHOR Matlak, Richard E.; Kerber, Kenneth W.
TITLE Pedagogical, Psychological, and Literary Applications of Self-Report Inventories.
PUB DATE Aug 83
NOTE 13p.; This paper is based on a poster session presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (91st, Anaheim, CA, August 26-30, 1983). Figure 1 removed due to copyright restrictions.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Characterization; Higher Education; *Integrated Activities; *Interdisciplinary Approach; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Research; Research Methodology; *Self Evaluation (Individuals); Social Psychology
IDENTIFIERS *Self Report Inventory

ABSTRACT

To determine whether self-report psychological inventories could be used to better understand characters in literature, a psychology instructor and an English instructor arranged their courses so that they both focused on interpersonal relationships. The psychology course emphasized research on attraction, romantic love, and interpersonal relationships, while the English course analyzed the literary representation of male-female relationships in short stories and novels. Psychological inventories were used with 18 students in the two courses to explore (1) a pedagogical hypothesis that Leary's Interpersonal Adjective Checklist would identify problem areas in student interpretation of character motivation in fiction; (2) a psychology-of-reading hypothesis that a significant relationship would exist between a reader's view of human nature, as measured by Wrightman's Philosophy of Human Nature Scale, and his or her description of characters on the Leary Checklist; and (3) a literary hypothesis that the classic categorizing of characters into "round" and "flat" would be corroborated by reader perception of the character's interpersonal behavior on the Leary Checklist. Results supported all three hypotheses, indicated the potential value of using self-report inventories to understand fictional characters, and showed that the interdisciplinary approach enhanced both the teaching and the learning processes. (Charts of data are appended.) (Author/FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED236553

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Pedagogical, Psychological, and Literary Applications of Self-report Inventories

Richard E. Matlak and Kenneth W. Kerber

College of the Holy Cross

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Richard E. Matlak

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This paper is based on a poster session presentation at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, Anaheim, August, 1983.

Departments of English & Psychology
College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, MA 01610

CS 007339

Pedagogical, Psychological, and Literary Applications

of Self-report Inventories

Abstract

The authors tested three hypotheses in their paired courses in psychology and literature: (1) a pedagogical hypothesis that Leary's Interpersonal Adjective Checklist would identify problem areas in student interpretation of character motivation in fiction; (2) a related psychology-of-reading hypothesis that a significant relationship would exist between a reader's view of human nature, as measured by Wrightsman's Philosophy of Human Nature Scale, and his or her description of characters on the Leary Checklist; and (3) a literary hypothesis that the classic categorization of characters into round and flat would be corroborated by reader perception of the character's interpersonal behavior on Leary's dimensions. Though exploratory, results supported all three hypotheses. Furthermore, the pedagogical convenience to both authors of having the other's disciplinary content and methodology available in class uniquely enhanced the teaching and learning process.

Pedagogical, Psychological, and Literary Applications of Self-report Inventories

The authors taught paired courses in literature and psychology in a program of interdisciplinary studies for undergraduates. Both courses focused on interpersonal relationships. The English course closely analyzed the literary representation of male-female relationships in short stories and novels; the psychology course emphasized an understanding of research on attraction, romantic love, and interpersonal relationships. A major objective of these courses was to examine whether self-report psychological inventories could be used to better understand characters in literature.

At the outset, the authors formulated three hypotheses to be explored using two psychological inventories: (1) a pedagogical hypothesis that the Leary Interpersonal Adjective Checklist (Leary,1957) would allow for a precise indication of where differences and misunderstandings arose in the interpretation of character motivation; (2) a related psychology-of-reading hypothesis that a significant relationship would exist between a reader's philosophy of human nature, as measured by Wrightsman's scale (Wrightsman, 1964), and his or her description of characters on the Leary Checklist; and (3) a literary hypothesis that the classic, impressionistic description of "round" and "flat" characters (Forster, 1927), or life-like and one-dimensional characters, would be corroborated by the representation of the character's interpersonal behavior on the eight dimensions of the Leary Checklist.

These hypotheses were designed to examine issues of interest to instructors of both psychology and literature. For a psychology instructor, these hypotheses explore the possibility that characters in literature could be used as the subject matter of an analysis based on research in social psychology and personality. Perhaps short stories and novels could provide a context for

understanding the abstract concepts used to represent psychological processes, and allow students to apply these concepts to a convenient, yet uninterpreted set of fictional relationships. For an English instructor, the pedagogical hypothesis represents a matter of concern to teachers of formal analysis, or close reading, the primary pedagogy of literature. The psychology-of-reading hypothesis relates closely to an important subfield of literary criticism, namely, reader-response criticism (Bleich, 1978; Holland, 1975a, 1975b). Finally, the literary hypothesis relates to the observation that literary analysts and psychologists have used parallel images to describe persona, specifically, the metaphors of roundness and flatness in literature and the image of circularity in Leary's system and in other work on circumplex models of personality (Wiggins, 1980).

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 18 college undergraduates who voluntarily enrolled in two four-credit courses in psychology and literature taught during the same semester.

Measurement Instruments

The Leary Interpersonal Adjective Checklist (Leary, 1957) consists of 128 items related to an eight category taxonomy of interpersonal behavior. The eight categories and the items in each category are shown in Figure 1. Responses to the 128 question., 16 of which relate to each category, can be coded on a circle diagram divided into octants.

Wrightsman's Philosophy of Human Nature Scale (Wrightsman, 1964) consists of 84 statements measuring attitudes of trustworthiness, altruism, independence, strength of will and rationality, complexity of human nature, and variability in human nature, along with an overall assessment of the favorability of the

respondent's view of human nature.

Procedure

Each student completed the Philosophy of Human Nature Scale with respect to his or her own view of human nature. The Interpersonal Adjective Checklist was used by each student to describe the behavior of four characters from three literary works: Eveline from James Joyce's story of the same name (Joyce, 1969), Farrington from Joyce's "Counterparts" (Joyce, 1969), and Pip and Joe from Dickens' Great Expectations (Dickens, 1972). Students were unaware of the three hypotheses prior to completing the inventories.

Results

The Pedagogical Hypothesis: Octants of the Leary Checklist that produced the highest standard deviation among the students did indeed isolate areas of disagreement for analysis and discussion. For example, student ratings of the character Eveline yielded the largest standard deviation for the Responsible-Hypernormal octant. Joyce's story is almost wholly an internal monologue of an eighteen-year-old's thoughts on the most important decision of her life, namely, to elope and thereby escape the fate of her mother's final derangement and early death, or to remain at home in service to her thankless, selfish father, as she had promised her mother on her deathbed. In effect, it is a choice between life and death, between freedom and responsibility to her surviving parent. Student responses reflected strong disagreement over Eveline's sense of responsibility in finally not eloping. Students who rated Eveline as highly responsible were rating her commitment to her father; students who rated Eveline as irresponsible were rating her lack of responsibility to self. Analysis of responses thus provided an insight into class disagreement over character motivation.

The Psychology-of-Reading Hypothesis: Ratings on the Leary Checklist of a

Joyce character from "Counterparts," a loathsome, brutish protagonist named Farrington, were related to students' responses on the Philosophy of Human Nature Scale. Correlations ($p < .05$) revealed that students who had a more favorable view of human nature rated Farrington as less managerial and as less cooperative and tended ($p < .10$) to rate Farrington as less responsible and less competitive. Though only suggestive, these relationships indicate that a favorable view of human nature may be associated with more negative evaluations of unfavorable characters. Analysis of other characters suggested the complementary hypothesis that a favorable view of human nature may be associated with a more positive evaluation of favorable characters. If this interpretation is supported with additional evidence, it would be the first quantitative demonstration of a link between attitudinal variables and reader response to literature.

The Literary Hypothesis: Carson (1969:112) has described the behavior of adjusted and maladjusted persons with reference to the Leary Checklist as follows:

> We would expect reasonably well-adjusted persons to be capable, in appropriate circumstances and with modulated intensity, of displaying behaviors across the entire range of the eight categories. ...Within the framework of the interpersonal circle, psychological maladjustment usually manifests itself in the form of a rigid, inappropriate, inflexible reliance upon behaviors within a particular segment, which are often produced with great intensity.

In a nearly analogous description, Forster (1927:67,78) presents the concepts of round and flat characters:

> Flat characters were called "humours" in the seventeenth century, and are sometimes caricatures. In their purest form, they are constructed

> round a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round.... The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way.... It has the incalculability of life about it--life within the pages of a book.

To examine the hypothesis that a flat character would exhibit extreme behavior in one or just a few octants of Leary's system whereas a round character would exhibit moderate behaviors in all octants, the authors chose two characters from Dickens' Great Expectations: Pip as the test of roundness and Joe as the test of flatness. In this novel of a character's development from boyhood to adulthood, Pip is found in a variety of situations interacting with a wide range of people in his growth toward emotional maturity and social responsibility. Joe, on the other hand, who plays the archetypal wise-fool, is seen in a variety of situations, but as the book's standard of moral goodness, Joe does not change. Average class ratings of Pip and Joe for the eight octants in Leary's system are shown in Figures 2 and 3, respectively. As these figures indicate, Pip literally is a "round" character exhibiting moderately intense behaviors in all octants, whereas Joe exhibits more extreme behaviors in two categories (responsible and cooperative) and clearly is not as well-adjusted as Pip. He is incapable of learning to adapt his behavior to the situation.

Discussion

The use of Leary's Checklist to describe literary characters helps the instructor to identify and bring into focus areas of student disagreement regarding the interpretation of character motivation. Use of the checklist also encourages close reading of the literary work and thorough understanding of the checklist itself, because students must be prepared to defend their description of a character. Of course, the checklist is time-consuming to complete and

score, and can become wearisome if used too frequently. However, the advantages of an objective method for identifying different interpretations of character motivation warrant further investigation of this approach.

The use of psychological inventories in reader-response analyses provides a quantitative method for examining the association between the attitudes and beliefs of readers and their interpretation of literary characters. This type of analysis may represent one of the most interesting ways of integrating psychology and literature because it involves a non-psychoanalytic analysis not only of the characters but of the readers as well. A better understanding of what underlies reader-response would be valuable to psychological theorists of literature, as well as to psychologists interested in the source of individual differences in response to the same person or social situation. In addition, this type of analysis is much easier to conduct than the psychoanalytic model suggested by Holland (1975a, 1975b).

The apparent correspondence between Forster's round and flat characters and Leary's view of psychological adjustment and maladjustment provides an interesting parallel between literary and psychological analysis and tends to support the validity of each conception. In addition, Leary's system provides a method for discussing the degree of roundness (or flatness) of a character, rather than simply making a categorical judgment.

In conclusion, while the present examination of the pedagogical, psychology-of-reading, and literary hypotheses was exploratory, the results indicate the potential value of using self-report inventories to understand characters in literature. At the same time, the use of literary characters as the subject matter for a psychological analysis gives life to abstract concepts and teaches students to use these concepts in concrete situations.

References

Bleich, D. Subjective criticism. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978.

Carson, R. C. Interaction concepts of personality. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.

Dickens, C. Great expectations. Second edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1972.

Forster, E. M. Aspects of the novel. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1954.

Holland, N. N. Poems in persons. New York: W. W. Norton, 1975a.

Holland, N. N. Unity identity text self. Publications of the Modern Language Association, 1975b, 90, 813-822.

Joyce, J. Dubliners. New York: Viking, 1969.

Leary, T. Interpersonal diagnosis of personality. New York: Ronald Press, 1957.

Wiggins, J. S. Circumplex models of interpersonal behavior. In L. Wheeler (Ed.), Review of Personality and Social Psychology. Vol. 1. Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1980.

Wrightsman, L. Measurement of philosophies of human nature. Psychological Reports, 1964, 14, 743-751.

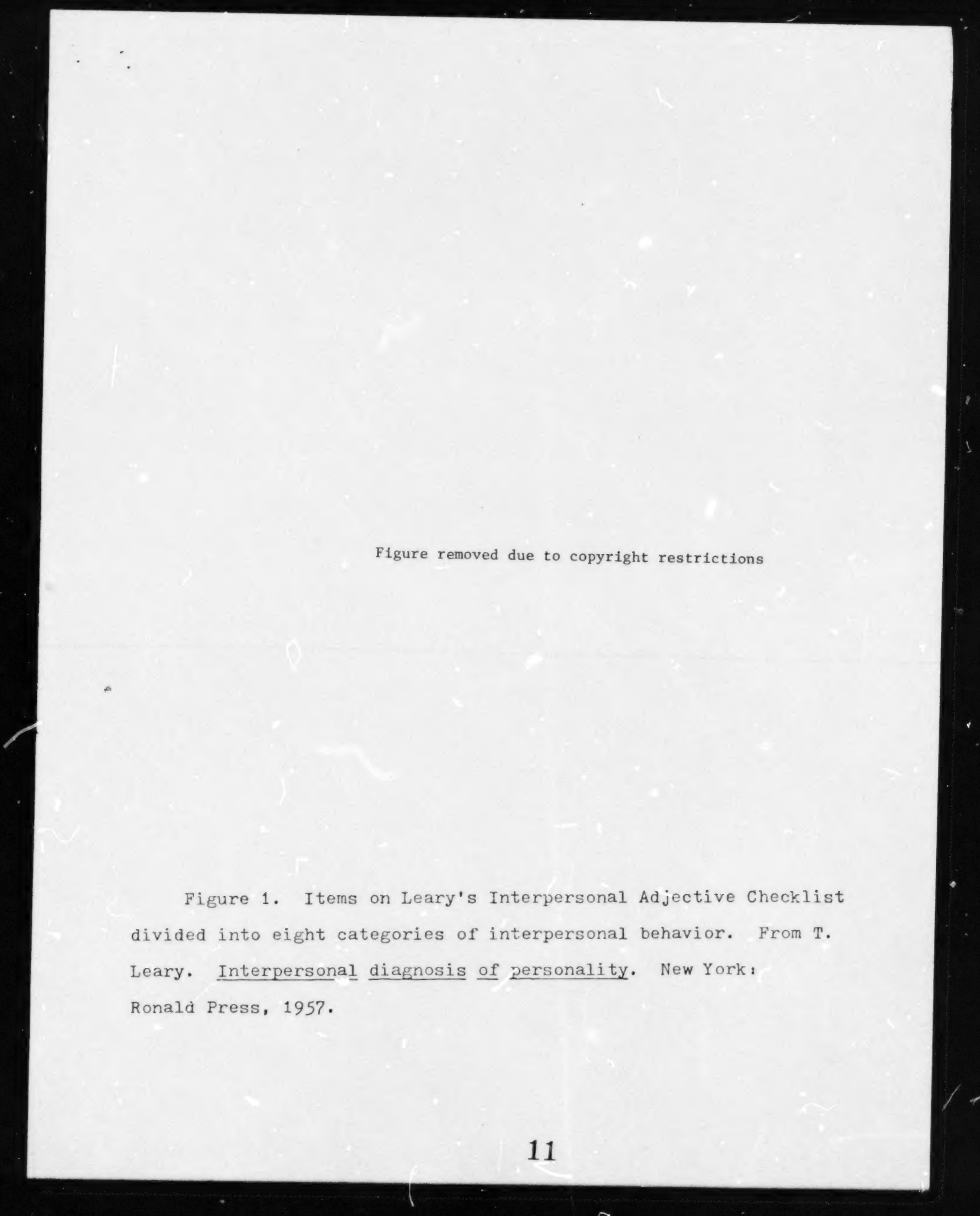

Figure 1. Items on Leary's Interpersonal Adjective Checklist divided into eight categories of interpersonal behavior. From T. Leary. Interpersonal diagnosis of personality. New York: Ronald Press, 1957.

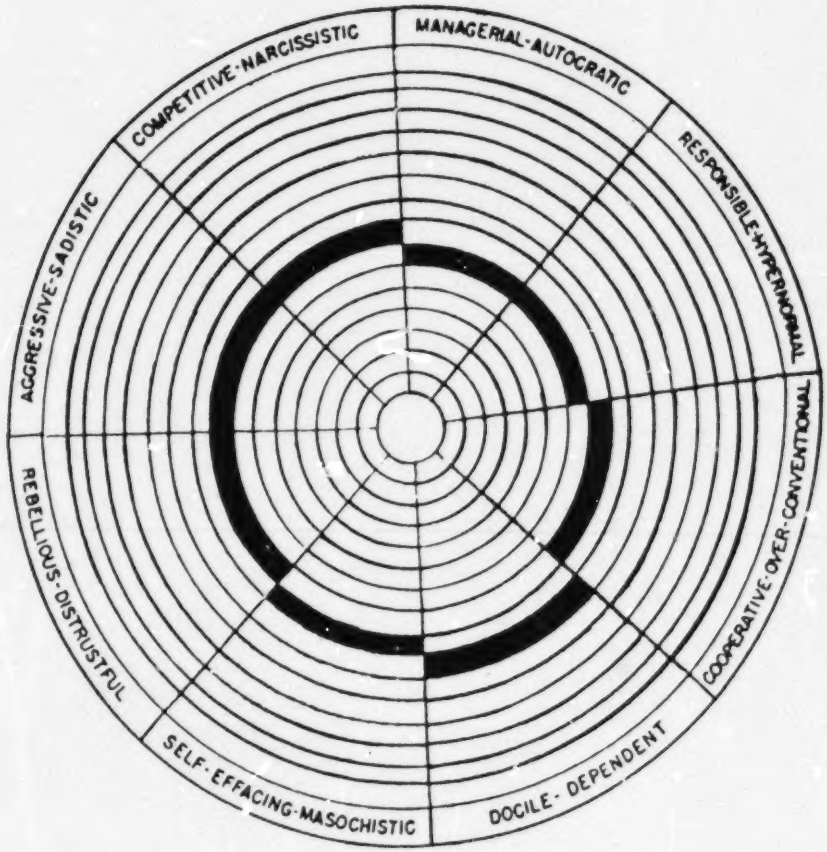

Figure 2. Average class ratings of Pip for each octant of Leary's system. Distance of the dark bar from the center of the diagram indicates the extremity of the corresponding behavior (range of 1 to 16 in each octant).

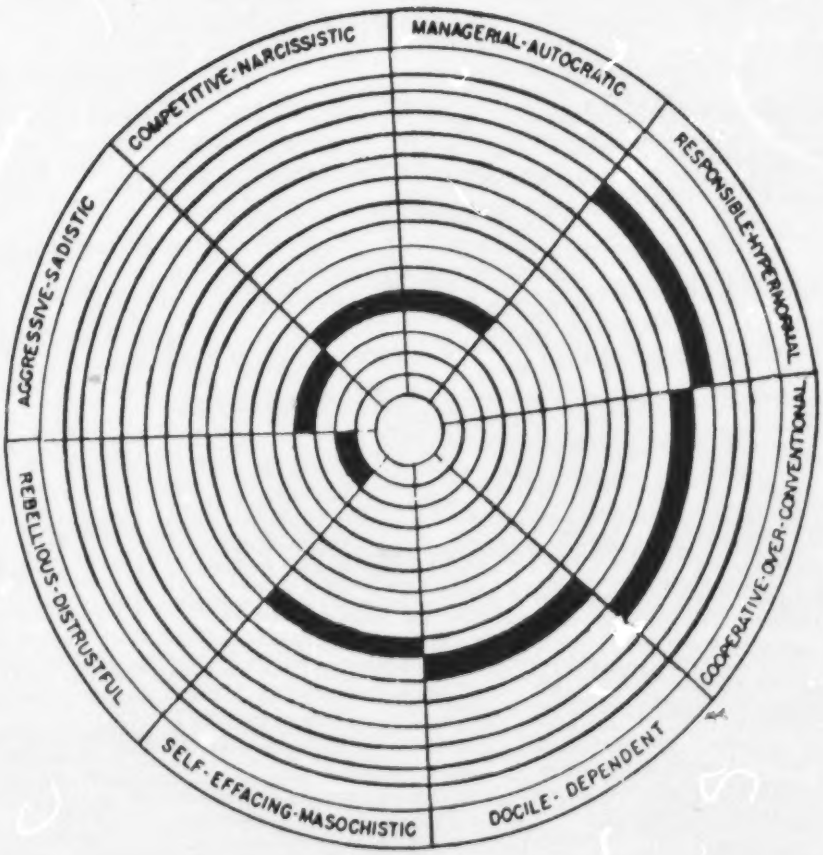

Figure 3. Average class ratings of Joe for each octant of Leary's system. Distance of the dark bar from the center of the diagram indicates the extremity of the corresponding behavior (range of 1 to 16 in each octant).